Trapping In The

New Millenium

History of Trapping

Long before Columbus dreamed of the New World, Native Americans were using wildlife as a renewable resource. Pelts, meat, and bones played an essential role in everyday life. Early Americans also depended on wildlife in their struggle to survive. One of Lewis and Clark's objectives during their 1804-1806 expedition was to seek new fur harvesting territory. During the era of westward expansion, beaver exports played a major role in the colonies' economies. Two members of the expedition, John Colter and George Drouillard, later returned to the upper Mississippi as fur harvesters (11). Fur harvesting has represented a vital socioeconomic aspect of life throughout history and remains equally important today. Through scientifically regulated wildlife management, animal populations are higher today than they were when our forefathers were alive.

Ecological and Economic Aspects of a Trapless Society.

Large predators such as cougars and wolves have a difficult time adapting to human encroachment. With the decline of these predators in populated areas, other furbearers have experienced a dramatic increase in numbers. Large concentrations of humans and wildlife in close proximity to each other leads to property damage, domestic animal attacks, and potential spread of disease. In situations like these, trapping is an effective wildlife management tool. Unfortunately, not everyone understands the benefits of trapping. Some are unaware of its methods; others are swayed by campaigns that distribute misinformation. Some states have banned or severely restricted trapping. Many of these states now feel the pressure and consequences of their actions.

Since 1996 when Massachusetts outlawed trapping, the beaver population has nearly tripled from 24,000 to over 70,000 (1,2). With this increase in population there has been an increase in complaints. Beaver dam culverts and girdle and down trees, creating localized flooding that causes homeowner damage such as flooded septic systems. Highway departments spend time and money removing obstructions from culverts and clearing dams (1,13). Colorado also has seen a significant increase in its beaver population and depredation complaints after restricting trapping in 1996. Eagle County's beaver-related complaints increased from 20 to 120 complaints a year. (4) A 1975 survey by county extension agents showed that beaver caused about $3 million in damage. Ten years later the Wigley and Garner's landowner survey by the University of Arkansas estimated beaver damage at $23 million. (4) In 1993 Arkansas created the "Beaver Eradication Program" under Act 360. It is now called the "Conservation District Beaver Control Program." In an effort to control beaver populations, the act allows counties to pay a bounty for beaver tails at a cost of $150,000 each year to the state. (4) After years of decreased nutria harvesting (only 24,683 in 2002), the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries implemented the Coastwide Nutria Control Program (CNCP) to fix vegetation damage caused by the overpopulation of nutria. This program was funded by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act (CWPPRA). The act paid 1.2 million dollars in incentive payments last year to participants who harvested nutria. As a result, the nutria harvest harvest increased to 308,160. The nutria's value increased from $35,066 in 2002 to $1,232,640 in 2003 (5). Beaver and nutria are just two examples of furbearers that create damage. Many other furbearers can cause damage when their populations lack regulated harvesting. Raccoon are notorious for raiding crops and preying on poultry farms. Coyotes' attacks on livestock cause millions of dollars in losses each year. These losses are passed on to the consumer at the grocery store.

Clearly, the economic cost of bans and restrictions on trapping is enormous. Consider, too, the increased spread of diseases, the number of domestic animals killed each year by wild predators, and the unwanted human-animal confrontations. According to Keel Kemper, an assistant regional wildlife biologist for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, "There's no question that the outcome of urban growth and development will continue to cause conflicts." Kemper goes on to state that "legal trapping of beaver makes economic sense for private landowners and municipalities because it's done at practically no expense. It's the most practical and effective tool to manage furbearing animals at this time." Voters dislike paying more taxes for services that previously had been provided for free through regulated fur harvesting (12). Everyone suffers when trappers are prevented from controlling animal populations.

Positive Influence of Trapping

Trapping makes good sense. Along with counteracting the problems mentioned above, it also influences the community in a positive way. Contrary to popular belief, more people across the country are choosing to trap. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife sold an additional 300 licenses over the previous year (6). Brian Giddings, Furbearer Coordinator for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, said that Alaska has also sold more licenses (7.9). Recently, they reported having sold:

Resident Fishing, Hunting Trapping- # 564
Non Resident Hunting Trapping- # 32
Non Resident Hunting Trapping- # 32
Non Resident Hunting Trapping- # 32
Resident Trapping- # 701
Resident Low Income- F/H/T # 14,921
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Resident Trapping- # 701

Total 21,945 Licenses Sold

The money spent each year on licenses generates millions of dollars for the states that participate in trapping. This money is used to improve the states through a variety of programs.

The positive effects of trapping continue. The harvesting of furbearing animals helps the economy as well. According to NAFA (North American Fur Auction), one of the largest fur auction houses in North America, fur sales have increased over the last several years. Fur from the United States brought $12,230,000 in the 2001-2002 season, and $12,667,000 for the 2002-2003 season. NAFA also contributes ¼ of 1% to the sellers' home states for trapper education. Don't forget that NAFA contributes 1.4% of fur sales to wild fur promotions (In 2006, the figure was about $189,000.) The above numbers involve only the fur sold at the NAFA sales, and do not reflect the money generated by other auction houses, or from direct market sales. The State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conducts a yearly fur trapper survey. The 2000-2001 survey showed that 2,024 of the respondents generated $378,037 from the sale of wild fur. As you can see, trapping generates not only large sums but also provides a needed service.

In addition to being a positive ecological and economical influence, trapping is also highly regulated. In the United States, wildlife agencies have legal authority to pass laws that govern furbearer resources. Local environmental police, conservation officers, and game wardens enforce the various laws within each jurisdiction. The following laws regulate trapping:

- **Mandatory licensing of trappers**
- **Regular checking of restraining devices**
- **Mandatory trapper education**
- **Restricted seasons for trapping**
- **Restrictions on the size of restraining device**
- **Restricted areas for trapping certain species**
- **Mandatory tagging of restraining devices for owner I.D.**
- **Restrictions on the types of restraining devices**

Trappers and professional wildlife biologists monitor the populations of furbearing animals. With input from trappers, scientific studies are conducted to ensure that these species are managed properly. Trappers themselves identify which devices work best with each species and which devices need improvements. New devices are continually being developed. A foothold trap of the right size, correctly set, will typically catch and hold the target animal without injury. North American wildlife conservation programs apply three basic principles in establishing and managing harvests of wild animals: (1) The species is not endangered or threatened; (2) The harvest techniques are acceptable; and (3) The harvest of these wild animals serves a practical purpose. Foothold traps are often used to capture rare or endangered species unharmed so that the animals can

be introduced into favorable habitats to reestablish healthy populations. Foothold traps also help protect rare and endangered species from undesirable levels of predation caused by furbearing predators such as raccoon, opossum, skunks, and coyotes. The target animals trapped during these operations are either used as a natural resource or relocated after capture. Regulated trappers conduct and supervise the trapping at no cost to the public.

At this point you may be wondering what you can do to protect trapping rights. Think of trapping as a bank statement. As a member of a democratic society, you are in a position to support or reject trapping related laws. Just as a president of a bank sets standards regulating money in his bank, all stakeholders in a democracy have a right and an obligation to manage our balance (the populations of wildlife). In our account, interest and deposits (births and immigration) increase the balance (population) every spring and summer; Taxes and withdrawals (mortalities and emigration) decrease it by roughly the same amount every fall and winter. Accountants (trappers and wildlife biologists) monitor the bank statements and advise the owner (the public) on when and how much of the balance can be withdrawn (harvested) that would otherwise be lost to taxes (other forms of mortality). Working together, we (trappers and government officials) can harvest the correct number of furbearers, benefiting both the trapper and the community, thereby achieving a mutually beneficial ecological and economical goal.

The following chart illustrates the consequences of a non-regulated beaver population:

Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Adults	2	2	2	6	10	14	26	46	74	126
2 Yr Old	0	0	4	4	4	12	20	28	52	92
1 Yr Old	0	4	4	4	12	20	28	52	92	148
Kits	4	4	4	12	20	28	52	92	148	252
Total	6	10	14	26	46	74	126	218	366	618

(1) Beaver Increase Pleases Biologists New York Times 6/18/01 http://penobscotnation.org/Articles/061901.htm

(2) Beavers' rule gets swampy AR-News
http://lists.envirolink.org/pipermail/ar-news/Week-of-Mon-20030707/003200.html

(3) Village of Bloomingdale Nuisance Wildlife Control Policy
http://www.vil.bloomingdale.il.us/Village%20Services/pw/wildlife.htm#nui

(4) Beaver Damage Prevention and Control Methods University of Arkansas
http://www.uaex.edu/Other_Areas/publications/PDF/FSA-9085.pdf

(5) Fur Harvest Update
http://www.alligatorfur.com/annual.htm#fur

(6) Fur-trapping in Maine far from dead Kennebec Journal Online www.centralmaine.com/sports/stories/261886.shtml

(7) State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game 10 year recap- number sold
www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/admin/license/10yr2003sold.pdf

(8) Fur Trapper Survey 2000-2001 by Brian Dhuey www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/harvest.htm

(9) State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game 2002 Calendar Year License Sale Statistics
http://www.admin.adfg.state.ak.us/admin/license/2002info.pdf

(10) Trappers glad to see boost in price of fur. WILDTRADE-VLC www.undp.orgvn/mlist/wildtrade/012003/post7.htm

(11) Fur Trappers Today Carry On A Colorful Tradition Diane M. Tipton, FWP Statewide Information Officer
www.fwp.state.mt.us/news/article_2750.aspx

(12) Bad Rap on Trapping? Kennebec Journal Dec. 21,2003 www.centralmaine.com/sports/stories/261748.shtml

(13) Managing Nuisance Beavers Along Roadsides A guide for Highway Departments. Cornell University
http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/beaver3.pdf